



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

ETHIOPIA

SUCCESS STORY

Bringing Natural Family Planning Home

Health workers teach women how to plan for or prevent pregnancy



Photo: Pathfinder/Margot Kane

Hirut Bekele (right) learned about natural family planning methods from community-based reproductive health agent Lemlem Bushe (left). The Standard Days Method used in Ethiopia teaches women how to track their fertile and infertile days.

“I am free of any side effects in using this method. I can also transfer this knowledge and experience I have to others,” said Hirut Bekele, who is practicing natural family planning.

Like most Ethiopians, young Hirut Bekele had never used family planning before. In Ethiopia, only a small percentage of the population (14.7%) uses contraceptives. When Hirut gave birth to her first daughter, health agent Lemlem Bushe taught her and her husband about breast-feeding and natural family planning methods.

Natural family planning is changing the lives of hundreds of Ethiopian women, who are learning the methods taught by USAID-funded programs through community-based reproductive health agents. The agents travel house-to-house, refer clients to facility-based services, and teach women about a natural family planning method called the Standard Days Method.

Since trained community volunteers can teach this technique (which itself does not require investing in additional resources), it has the potential to provide an immense benefit to Ethiopian women who choose a natural family planning method. The method teaches women to be aware of the fertile days in their menstrual cycle and to use protection or abstain from sex during those days to prevent pregnancy.

Aided by color-coded beads and calendars, women of varying literacy levels can track fertile and infertile days and easily monitor their cycle length. When used correctly, the method is more than 95% effective.

Community-based reproductive health agents follow up with clients on a monthly basis. As knowledgeable community members, the agents are ideal educators for couples using this and other methods of modern contraception to plan or prevent pregnancy. Approximately 130 health agents have been trained to offer counseling to interested families.